Back To The Beginning

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Change happens, just accept it. Our world has been changing since the beginning of the world, and it seems to be happening more rapidly than ever.

Religiously speaking, change happened in the 1st century just like it is happening in the 21st century. Sure, some of the issues that the 1st century church faced have gone away, but they have been replaced by other issues today. The early church wrestled with issues like circumcision and the varying doctrines of Gnosticism. Today, things haven't gotten any easier; we just wrestle with different issues.

Issues change over time. Each new generation rejects the ‘outdated’ philosophies of the older generation, and replaces them with ‘newer’ ideas and practices.

By the end of the 1st century, when John (probably the last remaining apostle) wrote his letters, many changes had occurred since Pentecost in the thinking, philosophies, and attitudes of the early Christians. As He addresses various issues that had arisen in the church, he outlines three timeless principles that should guide us as we confront changes today.

As religious changes are happening all around us,

1. We must go back to “the beginning,” not back to our traditions.

Going back to “the beginning” is what restoring New Testament Christianity is all about. In the midst of change, go back to how things were before they changed. John writes, “Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard” (1 John 2:7, ESV). Again he writes, “Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you,” and, “This is the message that you have heard from the beginning” (1 John 3:11). If we really want our beliefs to be acceptable to God, we must accept that which was taught “from the
beginning.”

**2. We must go back to the truth, not back to ‘religious-know-it-alls.’**

The direction of Christianity shouldn’t be dependent upon ‘highly trained professionals.’ Our religion shouldn’t be built upon the shoulders of denominational ‘priests’ or seminary-trained theologians. John writes directly to the untrained people; to children, fathers, and young men (1 John 2:12-14). Jesus Himself spoke directly to “common people” (Mark 12:37).

All of us – not just religious ‘know-it-alls’ – have the obligation to verify whether someone is teaching things of God (1 John 4:1). We must determine whether or not a teacher is “abiding in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9-11). The point John makes is that we each have the responsibility to think, believe, and obey the truth, even if doing so is in conflict with ‘elite’ religious leaders. If something contradicts the truth of the Bible (John 17:17), then it should be avoided.

**3. We must go back to the apostles, not back to the latest fashionable religious philosophy.**

What’s in style in 2013? Here are a few of the things that are “in” right now:

- The idea that there is no Hell, and if there is, it won’t last for eternity.
- The idea that Christ’s primary mission on earth was to save man physically, rather than spiritually (AKA the “Social Gospel”)
- The idea that God speaks to us apart from the Bible.
- The idea that the Bible is a ‘living’ document, meaning its ancient words are largely irrelevant to today’s post-modern culture.

Some fads have been around for a while, and they won’t be leaving any time soon. Just like what the Gnostics taught in the 1st century, the religious fads of today can be impressive and enticing (Seriously, who likes the idea of Hell being eternal?). But John writes of the apostles, “We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).

In other words, “Go back to what the apostle’s taught.” “What they say must be the litmus test by which you distinguish truth from error.” John later said, “Out testimony is sure” (3 John 12). When we go to the New Testament Scriptures today, we are going back to the apostles. This is the only way we can know what is right and wrong in matters of faith and religion.

In an age of change, the only answer to true Christianity unity and stability is to go “back to
the beginning,” the source of truth, the words of the apostles. This is something worth fighting for. Only by going “back to the beginning” can we be sure we are followers of God.